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ABSTRACT

Individualized instruction presents great potential for language teachers to meet their students' needs. At Raymond Walters General and Technical College, an individualized instruction program in French was developed and implemented. A conventional class was concurrently conducted to provide a basis from which the success of the individualized approach could be measured. The procedures of the individualized French class have evolved over the two-year period of its operation. Students are permitted to proceed at their own pace; the only grades given for the course are "A" and "B" since the student must minimally achieve 80% proficiency before continuing into further units. When students do not complete the required five units of coursework by quarter's end, they receive an "N" (no grade). Oral comprehension, reading, writing, and speaking are equally emphasized. Development of audio-lingual skills is facilitated through utilization of the language laboratory. Each unit of instruction has two sets of learning activities with specific objectives; grammar explanations and excercises, conversation and dialogue, new vocabulary, idioms, and other structural elements are presented through these activities. While individualized instruction is most demanding of the instructor's time, the individualized French program has been notably successful. (JDS)

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Individualized Instruction:

A Case Study of One Successful Program

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During the past several years, I have found myself subject to the problems all too common to foreign language teachers today--the decline of liberal education, changing standards that threaten the language "requirement," the new "vocational" emphasis on "practical" courses, the increasingly varied backgrounds and achievement levels of college students, to name just a few. Faced with these pressures, I had for some time been searching, along with many of my colleagues, for a new pedagogical outlook, some innovative approach that, if not a panacea, would at least provide fresh insights and an essential flexibility to the rapidly changing language teaching field. It was under these circumstances that I became attracted to Individualized Instruction. I attended a conference of the American Council of Teachers of Foreign Languages in Atlanta in November of 1972 and heard Professor Howard Altman discuss his program in Individualized Instruction at the University of Washington (he is, of course, now at the University of Louisville). The following summer I attended a two-week workshop on Individualized Instruction at West Chester State College in Pennsylvania under the direction of Professor Ronald Gougher. I thus received invaluable direction and training from the two academicians most closely and

notably associated with the concept of individualized language training. I accordingly introduced Individualized Instruction into one of my elementary French courses in the 1973-74 academic year.

Raymond Walters College is a two-year junior college, one of the sixteen divisions of the University of Cincinnati. It is not a "branch," but rather a fully autonomous college within the University granting associate degrees in general and technical education. Unlike many similar two-year colleges affiliated with universities, departments in Raymond Walters College are fully independent, with no control of any kind by the baccalaureate and graduate departments in other divisions of the University. About one-third of our students are in two-year career-oriented or technical programs; another one-third are in "transfer" or pre-baccalaureate programs; the remaining one-third fall into the rapidly expanding continuing education group, part-time students who will often move into full-time technical or baccalaureate programs. The College has an "open-door" enrollment policy; however, the location of the institution in the northeastern suburbs of Cincinnati and the variety of programs offered have brought us generally higher calibre students than ordinarily found in many other "open-door" schools.

Most (but not all) students taking foreign language at Raymond Walters are in the baccalaureate transfer programs, especially in Liberal Arts, although our Pre-Medicine Program supplies a number of students each year to our German classes. As has been true throughout higher education, our Liberal Arts enrollment has fallen noticeably. On the other hand, challenges to the foreign language prerequisite for the baccalaureate degree in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Cincinnati appear to have been beaten back, and as a result the two-year pre-Liberal Arts program in our college retains a language requirement. In addition, our language classes are attracting more and more older "continuing-education" students whose different educational backgrounds make them particularly suitable for Individualized Instruction.

I encountered no administrative or departmental difficulty in initiating an individualized program. Under the highly developed system of faculty responsibility for governance that exists in our college, I had to submit my proposal both to my department and to a College Faculty Curriculum Committee. This latter committee must approve all new curriculum offerings at Raymcnd Walters, but in this case the committee interpreted Individualized Instruction not as a new course but simply as a change in the tech-

nique of instruction, which is of course inherently the right of any teacher. Although the administration plays no direct role in curriculum questions within our college, their cooperation was necessary to establish some of the special procedures needed for grading and registration. In spite of the rigid computerized procedures which are in effect at the University of Cincinnati, the administration supported the needed modifications enthusiastically.

I teach two five-credit hour elementary French classes, but I "individualized" only one of these. Initially I did this to have a "control" class--with regularly scheduled work in a more or less conventional format--against which I could measure the success of the individualized approach. Even though after two years of experience I am more than ever convinced of the benefits of teaching under the individualized concept, I still have decided to retain the "control" or "conventional" class, because I have also found that some students either prefer or perform more closely to their abilities under the more highly structured learning environment. This is, I guess, the first lesson I have learned about the new approach--although Individualized Instruction provides the most efficacious means by which many students may learn a lan-

guage, it is nevertheless not for all students. Indeed, one of the major problems which I face is getting students into the class offering the most suitable technique for them. Some academic advisers (who schedule classes for students in our college) believe that the individualized method is only for students with low achievement records; others see it as only proper for those with the highest levels of performance. The fa t is--as I have found out after two years--that the ability level of the student is not the determining factor. Individualized Instruction is for both slow and fast students. Many other considerations--for example, the personalities and backgrounds of students, the degree of self-discipline, time available for study, to name just a few--should provide the criteria for putting a student under the individualized system. During my two-year experience, I have at times found it best to convince students that they would work better in a "conventional" class rather than in an "individualized" one, or vice versa.

The procedures for my individualized French class have evolved over a two-year period. A student is permitted to proceed at his own pace but must initially register for five units of credit each quarter for three quarters. If he does not complete the five units by the end of the

quarter, he will receive an "N" (an "N" equals no grade given and does not affect the cumulative grade point average). A student may, however, do more than five units, even possibly completing fifteen units in two quarters. The only grades given for completed work in the course are either an "A" or a "B", since a student must achieve at the 80 per cent level in both oral and written tests before being allowed to continue into the next unit. Thus, Individualized Instruction guarantees proficiency; the variable is <u>time</u>, not level of performance. Unless scheduled for specific activities (such as a conversation group), the student is not required to attend class. He may use the assigned class time in any way and in any place he wishes. However, I am available during each class contact hour, giving assistance to those who need it, working with students on a one-to-one basis, testing students both formally and informally, and conducting conversation groups on a predetermined schedule.

In both the "control" and "individualized" classes, I try to emphasize equally the four basic skills necessary to language study--oral comprehension, speaking, reading, and writing. In the beginning, I had some doubts about how well students could master the audio-lingual skills under an individualized approach, so I put particular

emphasis on satisfactory achievement in these areas. We have available in our college a fully equipped Language Laboratory with a full-time attendant, so that my individualized students can spend whatever time they need working with taped drills designed to fulfill the audio-lingual objectives of each unit. Tapes are available to complement the textbook and, in addition, I have prepared taped drills which follow carefully my "Learning Activity" packets. Our laboratory is open most evenings and on Saturdays, and the individualized students have used its facilities frequently during these off-hours. No special amount of time is required in the laboratory; it is strictly up to the student, who knows, however, that he must demonstrate a certain level of audio-lingual proficiency in each unit before proceeding to the next.

Every unit has two sets of "Learning Activity" packets with specific sets of objectives. The first contains grammar explanations, exercises to supplement the grammar lectures, and pre-tests; the other deals with oral-aural objectives--conversation and dialogue, new vocabulary and idioms, and other structural elements. After drilling with these packets and when he thinks that he is ready, the student may take the unit tests, both oral and written. He must reach at least an 80 per cent

proficiency level in both. Tests may be repeated as often as necessary, but in such cases the student must take an alternate form rather than the same test. Both the written and oral tests are taken outside of class in the Language Laboratory. Since there is a full-time attendant, the student may take the test at any time convenient for him. I keep a file on each student, with an analysis of test scores, pointing out areas of weaknesses and strengths.

In spite of some difficulties and necessary adjustments, I believe that my two years of Individualized Instruction have been notably successful. Enrollment in my French classes has remained steady at a time when the number of students in the Liberal Arts Program (the source of most of our language students) has declined. The most rewarding experience probably comes from observing the particular student who has either failed a foreign language in high school or who has never had a foreign language before. This type of student has frequently made significant progress in an individualized class, and I am certain that the same student would have dropped out of a regular class before having given language study an adequate chance. There may be many reasons for his failure in a conventional group--poor study habits, lack of experience in a foreign language, fear of language or of taking

tests. An individualized class helps the student make the necessary adjustment to foreign language study, but even more to the point I believe that students in my individualized program have learned a great deal about themselves. They tend to become much more realistic about their own abilities and their own weaknesses.

I have had one full-time student tutor with me during the past year. One of my former students, she has helped in class drilling individual students on specific points, answering questions and giving special help to the "slower" students. Since there are many diverse levels in this class, such assistance has proved especially valuable. Moreover, I have been pleased with the way in which all members of the class, regardless of the various levels, have demonstrated a willingness to help one another. Peer tutoring has been much more common in my individualized class than in the conventional one. Student evaluations have shown extremely positive reactions to the individualized approach. A sampling of student comments include:

> I have found that in my situation of working and being a full-time student I encountered some difficulty during the first few lessons of French grammar and consequently got behind in my lessons. If I had been taking French in a control class I would have been forced to drop out of the class or take a lower grade with a lesser degree of learning. As a result of this teaching

method I am now progressing at a satisfactory rate and feel that I can accelerate with a higher degree of proficiency.

The Individualized French Instruction has been a fantastic opportunity for me to learn a new language.... Learning AT MY OWN rate has been an incentive because it's helped erase old grammar hangups. It's helped convince me that it is not how fast one learns but how much. I do feel self-motivation plays an important part. This could be a problem in developing some students who do not really care....

I have enjoyed it because you work at your own speed and at the time you prefer.

The work needed to set up an Individualized Instruction Program requires more than the customary amount of dedication on the part of the teacher. In the beginning, I was completely exhausted by the time necessary to prepare learning packets, alternate tests, and other materials. Much time must be made available to meet students who need help and encouragement. Extensive taping for oral drills is particularly time-consuming. However, once the first materials were prepared, I have been able to organize my time much more efficiently. Still, anyone moving into Individualized Instruction must realize that it places great demands on a teacher's time. This is especially true during the spring quarter when students tend to be at more widely varying levels than earlier in the year.

As indicated earlier, I am not convinced that Individualized Instruction is for everyone. Even under

Individualized Instruction, I have lost a few of my students, and I feel certain that some of them need the constant pressure of a control class. I have also reached the conclusion that a limited amount of regular class attendance should be mandatory even under the individualized method (say at least two of five class periods each week). I have found that students in the individualized class who attend regularly usually do not fall behind as much as those who do not attend as often, although there are exceptions to this. It is the student who rarely comes to class who most frequently has difficulty in completing his work or who falls so far behind that he eventually loses interest altogether. I have also found that it is desirable to set a minimum amount of work that a student must complete in order to register for the next quarter (even when receiving an "N" for the previous quarter). This is essential for the student and the instructor both, because if a student gets too far behind he not only gets discouraged but finds it increasingly difficult to finish his work. Although the basic idea is to allow the student time to proceed at his own pace, it is better for the student and the teacher if at least a minimum pace is maintained.

Without doubt, Individualized Instruction offers

an important new vista for the foreign language teacher in the present troubled environment of academe. Each teacher needs to establish his own type of program, according to the particular situation in which he teaches, the nature of his students, and the demands of the community in which he works. But above all, as language teachers today, we must recognize that our students are our clientele and that we must meet their individual needs. Individualized Instruction presents the greatest potential for language teachers to meet this ~~this~~ obligation to their students.

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